

(Amended Four Times)1. In an online comparison system, a method of ranking prospective merchants comprising:

entering by a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information
5 related to a potential consumer purchase, the weighting factors corresponding to categories of merchant comparison information data;

receiving query information related to a potential consumer purchase;

receiving a plurality of merchant comparison information data for a plurality of
merchants [capable of] related to completing the potential consumer purchase, the merchant
10 comparison information data for a merchant organized into a plurality of categories, wherein the merchant comparison information data includes non-opinion data from at least two categories from: price category, product availability category, product inventory category, time to deliver product category, payment terms category, payment method category, merchant creditworthiness category, and inventory category information;

15 [entering a set of weighting factors prior to receiving information related to a potential customer purchase, the weighting factors corresponding to the categories of merchant comparison information data;]

calculating a plurality of respective merchant data weight resultant [value] values by:

(i) for each entered weighting factor, multiplying [a weighting factor]
20 one weighting factor from the entered set of weighting factors against one data value from [the merchant comparison information data of] the corresponding merchant data category[:], and

(ii) calculating an aggregate score for the merchant by summing the
plurality of calculated merchant data weight resultant values; [and]

25 ranking merchants based on the merchant aggregate score; and

returning the ranked merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants corresponding
to the received query information.

14. (Amended Four Times) A method of ranking prospective merchants in an
30 online comparison system, comprising the steps of:

entering by a consumer a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information
related to a potential consumer purchase of a user specified product;
receiving query information relating to [a] said user specified product;
retrieving a list of merchants from a database, wherein the list of merchants includes
5 merchants offering [the] said user specified product;
retrieving merchant specific information about the merchants in said list of merchants,
said merchant specific information including a plurality of merchant data entry values, the
merchant data entry values specifying non-opinion data;
[entering a set of weighting factors, wherein the entering occurs prior to receiving
10 information relating to a user specified product;]
applying weighting factors to said merchant specific information, said application
including:
(i) for each entered weighting factor, for a plurality of data entry values,
multiplying [at] the data entry value by at least one weighting factor from the set of
15 weighting factors to calculate a merchant data weight resultant value;
(ii) summing a plurality of merchant data weight resultant values to calculate a
merchant aggregate score;
ranking said list of merchants carrying [the] said user specified product based on the
calculated merchant aggregate scores; and
20 returning the ranked merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants corresponding
to said user specified product.

36. (Amended four Times) A method of ranking merchants in an online
comparison system, comprising:
25 receiving [entering] a set of weighting factors prior to receiving query information
specifying a product or service, the weighting factors corresponding to categories of
merchant comparison information, wherein the weighting factor is entered as a numerical

value and represents the relative importance given the corresponding merchant comparison information in ranking the merchants;

receiving query information related to [entering a query specifying] a product or service;

5 retrieving merchant comparison information data from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information data corresponding to the entered query, the merchant comparison information excluding opinion data or survey result data;

calculating a merchant score by:

10 (i) for a plurality of entered weighting factors, multiplying a weighting factor by a corresponding data value from the retrieved merchant comparison information to calculate a weighted category score[:]; and

(ii) summing the weighted category scores to calculate a merchant overall score; [and]

ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant overall score; and

15 returning the ranked merchants to the consumer, the ranked merchants corresponding to the received query information.

39. (Amended Four Times) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

20 selecting a weighting factor prior to receiving query information specifying a product or service, the weighting factors corresponding to merchant comparison information;

receiving query information related to [entering a query specifying] a product or service;

retrieving merchant comparison information from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information corresponding to the entered query;

calculating a merchant score by: